

A Disney program meant to encourage volunteerism throughout the country recently came to Warwick, resulting in a thorough clean-up and restoration of thirty-six of the city's 119 historic cemeteries, Mayor Scott Avedisian said today.

The Disney "Give a Day. Get a Disney Day" promotion gave one million participants the chance to volunteer in any of a number of programs sponsored by the HandsOn Network in exchange for a free, one-day, one-park ticket to either California's Disneyland or Walt Disney World, in Florida. By April, Disney had reached the one million volunteer mark and stopped the promotion.

Sue Cabecieras, the Planning Department's liaison to the Warwick Historic Cemetery Commission, registered the commission's cemetery cleanups as a beneficiary last fall, managed the City's account and placed and verified all of the volunteers.

Between January and mid-April, 106 people from throughout Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut worked in at least four-hour shifts, raking, pruning and bagging leaves and pulling weeds and brush. Cabeceiras said this number would have been much higher if the snow did not prevent cleanups earlier this year.

"The Historic Cemetery Commission has a dedicated group of individuals, civic and non-profit agencies that help with annual clean-ups," Avedisian said. "Having this additional resource – which resulted in well over 400 hours of work – has been extremely helpful to our commission members and everyone who is dedicated to preserving and celebrating our city's rich history."

"There's a quote from Benjamin Franklin that I love: 'Show me first the graveyards of a country and I will tell you the true character of the people,'" Cabeceiras said. "Ninety five percent of the City's historical cemeteries are currently well maintained, which speaks to this community's commitment to honoring the memory of all who are buried here."

Avedisian and Cabeceiras said they hope Disney will make this an annual program so the City can utilize these volunteers to help keep all of Warwick's Historical Cemeteries well maintained.